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F O R T U N E S W A S H E D A W A Y

"SINGAPORE--THE POMPEII OF AMERICA"

Broadcast No. 43 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

February 18, 1939 6:45-7:00 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ALLISON

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ALLISON

The Kalamazoo River flows into Lake Michigan not far from the pleasant summer resort of Saugatuck. And there, where the river spews its grit into the lake, lies all that is left of a once thriving lumber town, Singapore: the Pompeii of America! Singapore is rich in legend and lore. Over narrow trails through Singapore and the woods along the lake, swift Indian runners carried messages to Fort Dearborn of the fall of Michlimacinac. One hundred years ago, Oshea Wilder of New York purchased the land from the Barnes family, laid out the village, sold lots, opened stores, sawmills, a bank. But today, the lapping waves of Lake Michigan beat a dismal dirge along the sand dunes. Singapore is buried beneath that sand. But back to 1870...

SOUND: Buzz saw eating through lumber. Repeat several times. Then let saw idle as...

WILSON

How's that load of lumber gettin' along, Jim?

JIM

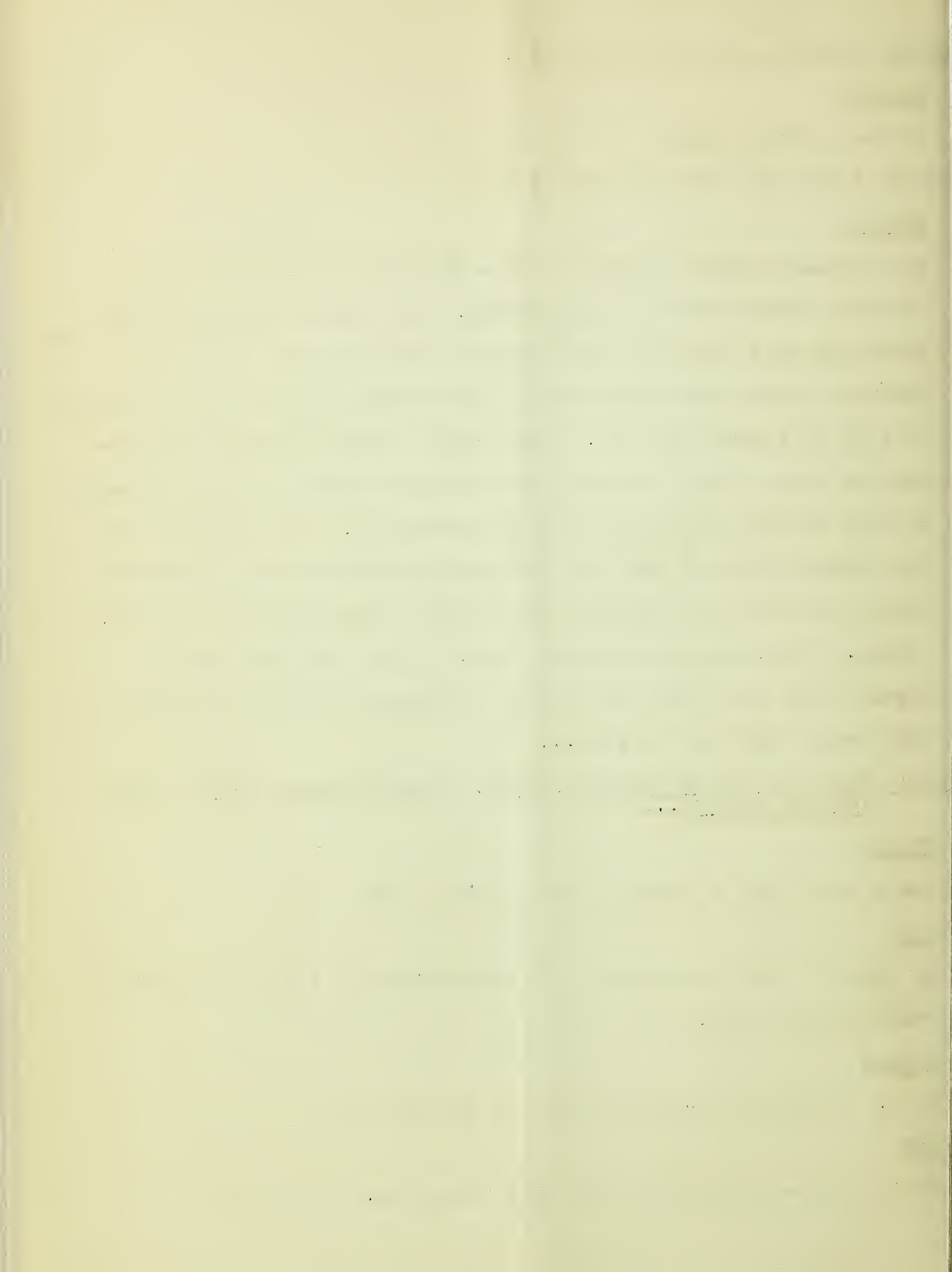
Be ready to load in the mornin', Cap'n Wilson. I was just gettin' ready to knock off.

WILSON

Good. You know me--always ready to get movin'.

JIM

You're gonna have a nice load this time, too. Nice load.



WILSON

Makes no difference to me, long's I keep hustlin'. And with three sawmills goin' here in Singapore, I'm kept hustlin' all right.

JIM

Everybody's hustlin' in Singapore. Two hundred people, and not a soul idle neither.

SOUND: Sawmill cuts off.

WILSON

This here mill of Wilder's is one of the best I've seen.

JIM

I'll say it is. We're puttin' out close to 175,000 feet a day.

I reckon it's the finest this side of Allegan. That's what James Smith was tellin' me the other day. Come on--let's go over to the bank.

WILSON

Not me. I get my money in good old U. S. currency. None of that script the bank is payin' off with. Of course, I guess that's all you mill hands can get.

JIM

It's not so bad. We spend it all right here anyhow, over at the company store. You've heard what Steve Nichols says about it...

WILSON

No. What's that?

JIM

Steve says, "The money is good enough at home, but you can't travel on it any farther than you can on a piece of bark." (Laughter, fading.)

ALLISON

In those wildcat days, Singapore was one of the most flourishing lumber towns in the state. It boasted three lumber mills, two hotels, several general stores, a bank that issued its own currency. Lots sold at a premium.

ORGAN: (softly in back of next speech.) THEY CUT DOWN THE OLD PINE TREE.

ALLISON

But like many another lumber town, Singapore was doomed to an early and speedy decay. The pine forests which once lined the banks of the Kalamazoo River were soon exhausted. And in 1875...

SOUND: Door opens and closes.

JIM (quietly)

Oh. I see you've heard the news.

STOREKEEPER

Yeah, we've heard it. They're movin' the mill.

WILSON

That means the end of Singapore.

STOREKEEPER

It's the end, all right. I'm going to move.

JIM

And leave Singapore, or what's left of it. Don't seem right, somehow. But all the trees are gone.

WILSON

And you see what's happenin' around here, don't you? Notice how the sand is movin' inland.

STOREKEEPER

Already it's buried those two ponds back over there. Now that the trees are gone, there's nothin' left to keep the sand from blowin'. And nothin' to keep us here. The trees are gone. And Singapore is gone.

ORGAN: GONE WITH THE WIND.

ALLISON

The streets of Singapore grew up to wild shrubbery. It only remained for the shifting sand dunes from Lake Michigan to perform the last rites, and Singapore was gradually buried. Old geographies still show the village of Singapore, once thriving and bustling, now abandoned. For now only a dreary waste of sand marks the spot where men's hopes and dreams rose--and fell.

ORGAN: GONE WITH THE WIND.

ALLISON

And now, once more we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is Ewing Jones.

JONES

Thank you, Paul Allison. It's a bit hard to describe Singapore as it is today. I was up there this week with Lee Rosencrans, and I'd like to take this time to thank Captain Will Wilson, and Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Bird, of Saugautuck, for their help in preparing this story.

The last mill moved away in 1875. Some people still tried to stay on. Jim Nichols was the last. He was living in a two-story house in the early eighties. The sand moved in downstairs, and he moved up. But finally, the dunes continued their inland march, and his house was completely buried. Today, as the sand shifts farther inland, it is beginning to uncover that old house, and an old cemetery--all that remains of Singapore.



JONES (continued)

Well, that shows you what can happen to sandy soils when the trees are cut down. That's the gloomy side, and here's the more cheerful side. Farmers and businessmen along the western part of Michigan are doing something about wind erosion. Here is Gene Charles, to tell you what that something is.

CHARLES

That something, Ewing, started with the erosion control demonstration work carried out by the Soil Conservation Service in Berrien County. Farmers up there are planting their orchards and vineyards on the contour. Approximately half of last year's contour planting of fruits has been terraced. There was a heavy increase of winter cover crops. There is a definite trend toward a sod management system of handling old, established orchards. Pastures and meadows are being improved. Cooperating farmers are using more lime and fertilizer. Longer rotations are being stressed. And, of course, thousands of trees are being planted on the more critical slopes.

JONES

That was the start. And the next step?

CHARLES

Soil conservation districts. Ottawa County was the first to form a district in Michigan, working under the leadership of County Agent Leo Arnold. Those farmers around Grand Haven are all ready to go, and are waiting for the spring planting season to start.

JONES

And then Muskegon County formed a district.

CHARLES

Muskegon County didn't wait for a district altogether. For something like 15 years, County Agent Carl Knopf has been carrying out an extensive reforestation program--a program that's brought results. It was the second county to form a district. Two supervisors have already been selected, and the farmers in Muskegon County will vote on the remainder late this month. So Muskegon County is all ready to go.

JONES

And next?

CHARLES

Back to Berrien County, again. Farmers outside of the demonstration area have seen the work that has been going on, and, working with County Agent Harry Lurkins, they're going after a district now. Here's the way you might sum up the land use situation in Michigan, Ewing: Farmers are meeting scientists on a common ground to build a program that is leading to proper land use, erosion control, and a richer inheritance for posterity through soil conservation.

JONES

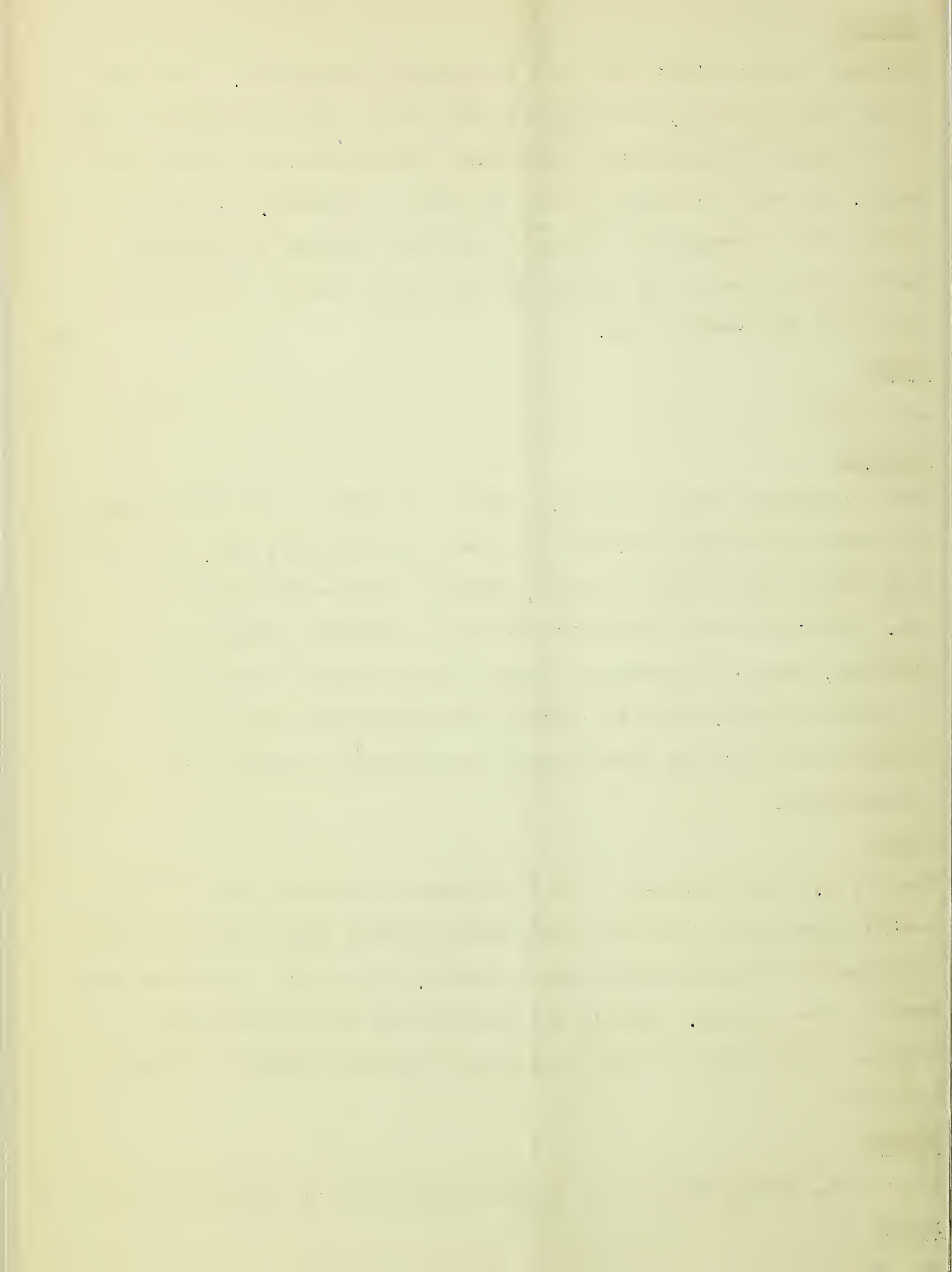
Thank you, Gene Charles, for that report on Michigan, and I think you'll agree that the same trend toward better land use is spreading throughout the entire Ohio Valley region. Now let's look over the rest of the country. Here's Art Susott from the Southeastern Region. Art, what are the farmers down in Dixie doing to control erosion?

SUSOTT

Right now, Ewing, one of the biggest activities is planting kudzu.

JONES

Oh, yes, that fast-growing legume they used to call porch vine.



SUSOTT

That's the one. You see, under good care kudzu grows rapidly--a single vine sometimes grows 70 feet in one season. In some sections it has been given the somewhat exaggerated name of "mile-a-minute vine." Right now is the kudzu-planting season. Farmers are planting it to control erosion on galled and gullied areas, and also in permanent strips in their cultivated fields.

JONES

I understand it makes excellent hay, too. How much kudzu are farmers in the Southeast planting this winter, Art?

SUSOTT

In erosion control demonstration areas and CCC camps in the 7 states of the Southeastern Region, they are planting about 25,000 acres. Incidentally, tree planting is moving along now.

JONES

Let's see, you plant mostly pine trees down there.

SUSOTT

Yes, pine and black locust. But we're also planting several million trees and shrubs of various species that encourage wildlife on eroded field borders and other waste areas. A lot of the land retired to trees was formerly in cultivation. Erosion on cultivated land is our big problem.

JONES

With clean-tilled crops like cotton, corn, and tobacco to deal with, I should imagine so.

SUSOTT

Add to that, Ewing, a lot of steep land and about 50 inches of rain a year and you have got a problem.

JONES

What's the solution, Art? Building a lot of terraces, for one thing, I suppose.

SUSOTT

That's part of it, but terracing alone won't do the job. More close-growing vegetation is the answer. Cooperating farmers are reducing their clean tilled crops by 250,000 acres. They have planted some of this land to trees. There are also increasing their pasture land, permanent hay, and other erosion-resisting crops, to mention a few changes that are taking place. The pasture and hay crops are badly needed to feed farm livestock in most cases, too. On land remaining in cultivation, they are establishing strip cropping on 400,000 acres.

JONES

And are other farmers following these practices, outside the erosion-control areas, I mean?

SUSOTT

Yes, many farmers outside these areas are adopting these practices. Then, too, the farmers themselves have organized 28 soil conservation districts.

JONES

And thank you, Art Susott. That certainly sounds as if farmers in the Southeastern region are determined to improve conditions on their farms. Well, let's spin the globe again, and now the finger points to Alan Dailey, of the Northeastern Region of the Soil Conservation Service. That region takes in all of the agricultural areas from the potatoes of Maine, down through the dairy lands of New York, the truck farms of New Jersey, and the diversified farming of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Alan, what's the good word from the Northeast?

DAILEY

If it's from the Northeast, it must be good, Ewing. And the good word is that soil conservation practices are resulting in better crop yields.

JONES

That's a good word in any part of the country. But, will you be specific?

DAILEY

All right, and New York comes to my mind right away. The soil erosion experiment station at Arnot found that lands protected from soil erosion produced from 10 to 36 more bushels of potatoes to the acre than did unprotected plots.

JONES

And what was the difference in these plots?

DAILEY

The two plots were laid out side by side on land where the soils and slopes are typical of several million acres of New York farming country. Each was planted to potatoes and sprayed, cultivated and dug as in ordinary farming. The same amount of fertilizer, six tons of manure and 300 pounds of superphosphate, was applied to each. The important difference, and the only difference, was that up-and-downhill farming was practiced on one and contour--or across-the-slope farming on the other.

JONES

And the protected plot produced the more potatoes.



DAILEY

In 1938, which was a dry season, the contour plot produced 15 per-cent more. And the up-and-downhill plot lost about five tons of soil to the acre, and the contour plot, none at all. Dr. John Lamb, supervisor of the experiment station, says that these experi-mental results bear out reports from farmers in the state's nine soil conservation areas. Those farmers will tell you that contour farming has cut down losses of soil, water, and fertilizer, and has increased yields.

JONES

That's a lesson well worth remembering. Have any other states made similar tests?

DAILEY

Most of them have, Ewing. I wish I could go right down the list. I would like to mention the experiments just completed by the Soil Conservation Service and the New Jersey College of Agriculture at the Boomerville Experiment Station...

JONES

That's in Sussex County, New Jersey, isn't it?

DAILEY

That's right. H. C. Knoblauch, in charge of work at the station, says that corn yields on plots partly protected from erosion were 15 percent greater than yields on unprotected plots. These re-sults show that erosion control measures, such as those farmers are already putting into effect all over New Jersey, can cut down these losses of topsoil, and increase crop yields.

JONES

Right you are, Alan Dailey, of Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. And many thanks for this bright report about the enterprising farmers of New York and New Jersey. Now, have we left out anyone?



COMBS

Ewing, did you ever hear of the great farming regions in the upper Mississippi Valley?

JONES

Indeed I have, and you're the man who can tell us all about them: Mr. L. R. Combs, former extension editor in Iowa, and now with the Soil Conservation Service. What's your story, Les?

COMBS

My story is about three farmers from Johnson County, Missouri. They represent 236 years of farm life. C. W. Manford is 83 years old; R. N. Martin is 77; and Charles W. Bodenhammer is 76. They've lived on farms all of their lives.

JONES

What has been their experience?

COMBS

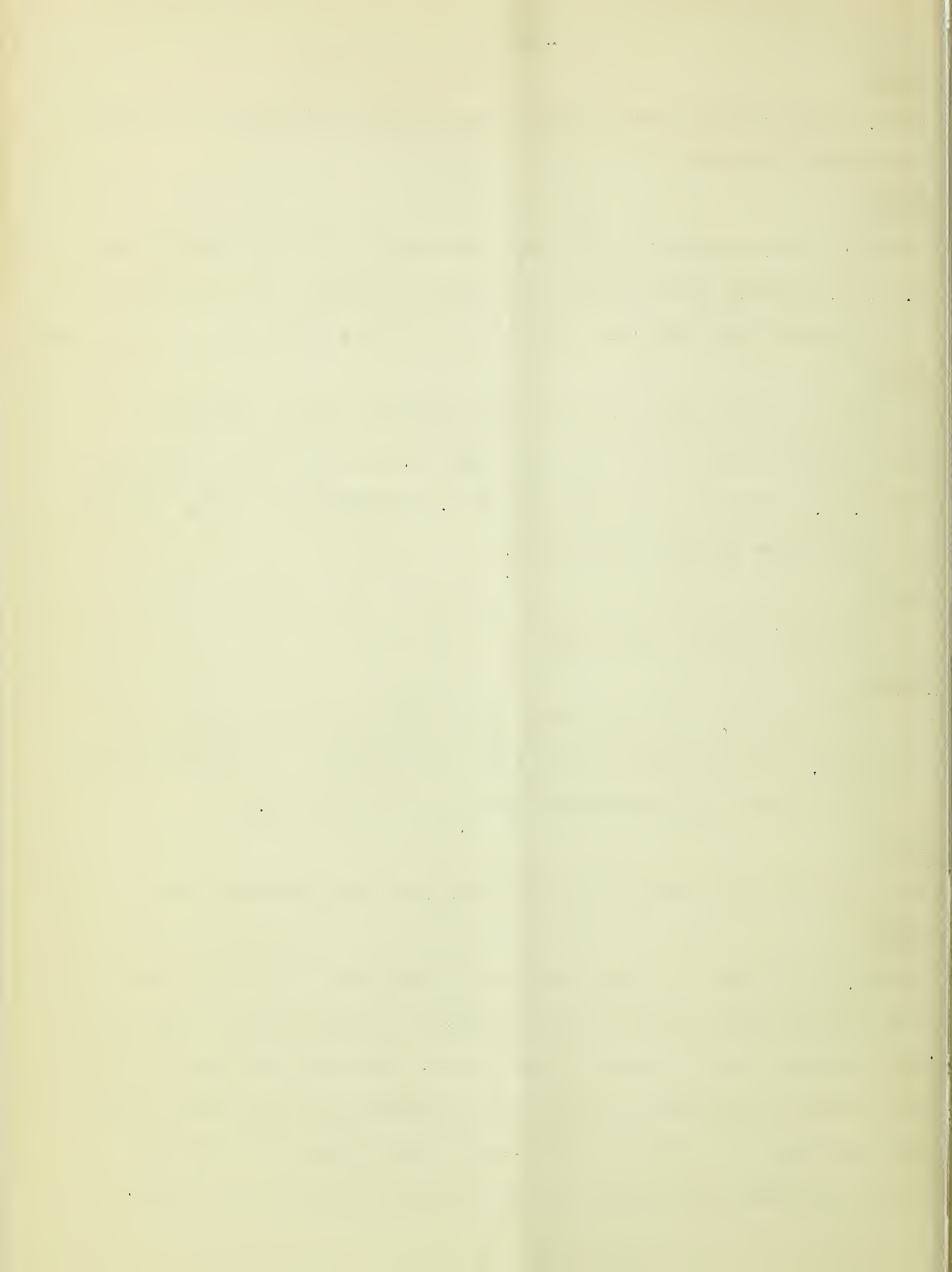
All of this time, they've farmed according to generally approved practices. Nevertheless, today more than half of the surface soil of their fields is gone--washed down into the rivers.

JONES

But what are they doing about it, Les...at this advanced age?

COMBS

Plenty. The three men are now cooperating with the Service and with the Missouri College of Agriculture in establishing complete soil conservation systems on their land. Contour farming, terracing, proper management of pastures, assignment of each acre to the task for which it is best fitted--these are phases of the soil-saving programs which have been established on the three farms.



JONES

There's a moral there, Les.

COMBS

There certainly is. We usually think that modern methods of farming belong to the younger generation. Perhaps it is true that most of the newer farming practices are employed first by the younger farmers. But the experiences of these three men show that older men on the farm--men who have had long experience in the farming game--realize the importance of soil conservation.

JONES

And a report like that is going to cause some heavy thinking on the part of many younger men who hesitate to adopt a soil-conserving program because it is new and different. Thank you for this story, L. R. Combs. And now, back to Paul Allison.

ALLISON

If you would like a copy of the latest bulletin on soil erosion control, write to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Next week, Burley Tobacco...

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ALLISON

Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the Agriculture Department of the Nation's Station.

